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SOURCE Newspapers as indicated.

BANGKOK PRESS REPORTS INCREASED SEIZURES OF OPIUM,
FEWER BANDIT RAIDS AND BORDER VIOLATIONS

Summary: An increased number of incidents involving the seizure of illegal opium appeared in the Thai press for December 1952 and early January 1953. There was a corresponding decrease in reports on the number of bandit forays and border violations. Most of the opium confiscation took place in Lampang Province where opium was concentrated for transport, but points along the route to Bangkok in Sukhothai and Chainat provinces also appeared in the news.

The more serious bandit depredations occurred in the south in Songkhla Province. Authorities received reports that Vietnamese dissidents had come into Thailand and that Thai and Chinese were using the southeast coastal islands as a base for illegal entry and exit.

Numbers in parentheses refer to appended sources. 7

Opium Transport in Lampang Province

On 18 December 1952, the Siam Nikon reported a 4 December 1952 incident in Region V, Lampang Province, where officials received information concerning the transport of illegal opium from Lampang Station by freight train. A group of officers and ten men watching at the station, where a freight car was being loaded with firewood, discovered two cars of opium hidden in the pile of wood. The authorities followed when the train proceeded to Mae Chang station, and there they seized opium in the water buckets on the locomotive and collected 22 cans of raw opium weighing 250,000 grams, worth one million baht. (1)

In a later issue, the same paper published another story of continued investigation at Lampang Station. The provincial officials discovered on the Lampang-Phisanulok train, in a third-class coach, three baskets of women's clothing. The baskets concealed a cache of opium beneath their false bottoms. The cache

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amounted to 2,700 grams of processed opium and 1,600 grams of raw opium, valued at 17,200 baht. On 10 December, police learned that a large quantity of illegal opium was being transported by car from Lampang to Tak. When the police halted it for a search, they found 81 kilograms of raw opium.(2)

Both Phim Thai and Siam Nikon carried accounts of another confiscation of opium in Lampang on 17 December 1952. The Excise Officer of Region V, Lampang Province, informed that opium was to be shipped by a Thai Airways passenger plane, went to the Lampang Airfield. There, aided by provincial police, he inspected a Thai Airways truck loaded with baggage and confiscated two suitcases which contained 16,000 grams of raw opium, valued at 64,000 baht. When no claimants for this luggage appeared, the case was turned over to the Chief of the Investigation Division.(3,4)

Opium Seized in Sukhothai and Chainat Provinces

A record opium seizure for Sukhothai Province, described in a Siam Nikon article, accounted for 500 kilograms, which was taken on the bank of the Yom River in Si Samrong Amphoe. In this action, a force of some 20 police surrounded and captured an "opium caravan" of 46 persons, who were transporting 43 cans of raw opium and one can of processed opium. The Governor of Sukhothai Province, Nai Chuam Sirisonthi, along with the chief of the provincial police, went to the area to make personal observations.(5)

Both the Prachathipatai and Siam Nikon described police action resulting from a tip that opium was being moved from Nakhon Sawan Province through Chainat to Bangkok. Forming an ambush with 15 men, the police chief waited on the road for the car coming from Pak Nam Pho. They stopped a Chevrolet, having a Bangkok license, that was carrying three passengers, and found a quantity of raw and processed opium valued at 5 million baht.(6,7)

Opium on Army and Railroad Property

An article in Phim Thai, on 27 December 1952, alleged that the First Army Command in Bangkok had received instructions from headquarters to take strong measures to prevent the entrance and storage of illegal opium on Army property. The article said that the Deputy Commander placed a guard at the gates to search all cars and established a patrol at night. The night patrol arrested a man with more than 20 containers of raw and processed opium on Army grounds. The defendant charged with the illegal possession of opium claimed he was hired to guard the cache. The court sentenced him to 4 months imprisonment, levied a fine, and confiscated the opium.(8)

Excise Department officials, advised that a shipment of opium was arriving on the Chiang Mai-Bangkok line, boarded the train at Hua Lamphong Station in Bangkok on 2 January 1953, according to a report in Phim Thai. After several hours' search the Opium Control Unit discovered 48 cans hidden in various compartments of the diesel locomotive. Weighing over half a ton, this illegal opium was estimated to be worth over 2 million baht. The investigating authorities interrogated the assistant engineer and five others in the crew, because the evidence indicated that hiding the opium was the work of men on the inside.(9)

Bandit Activity in South and East

According to Phim Thai, a bandit gang of seven, armed with Sten guns, was operating in Hat Yai Amphoe, Songkhla Province. This gang struck at successive villages, robbing and terrorizing the people. Local authorities learned that on 2 December 1952 these bandits plundered a house and took the residents as hostages, and then continued their depredations in Thung Tam Sao and Rattaphum. Two days later the officials, police, and volunteers engaged in a fight with the bandits at Kam Phaeng Phet, where they killed one and forced the rest to flee.(10)

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Although bandit activity in Region III appeared to have abated, Siam Nikon of 3 January 1953 reported that officials on an investigative trip had fired upon a band of 16 men under the bandit chief, Plang Chomram.(11)

Border Crossings by Bandits and Dissidents

According to another article in the same issue of Siam Nikon the Ministry of Interior reported satisfactory results for the bandit suppression campaign begun in July 1952 in the border provinces of Regions II and III. Charging that bandits in Thailand and Indochina were crossing the boundary to plunder, the Ministry urged the border units to persevere in their efforts to maintain order. The Ministry added that notorious bandit leaders had assembled their men in Prachin Buri, Chachoengsao, and Chantaburi provinces of Region II and in Surin and Buriram provinces of Region III.(11)

A Siam Nikon reporter, recounting a Laos border incident, stated that Excise Department officers in Nong Khai Province had kept under surveillance a group of Vietnamese agricultural workers. Becoming suspicious of bundles carried into a field shed, the officials raided the place at dawn and found there four adults who had French typewriters and handbills of various types. They caught one man working on seditious leaflets. These individuals were remanded to the police authorities at Nakhon Phanom for subsequent interrogation.(12)

In Sisaket a Chinese merchant was arrested after Communist newspapers and documents were found in his possession, according to a Siam Nikon account of 25 December 1952.(13)

An article in the 13 December 1952 issue of Prachathipatai reported police investigation of the entrance of an unregistered boat into Thai waters at Ko Kradat, Trat Province. Movements of Chinese and Thai strangers on the coast of Trat, Rayong, and Chantaburi provinces provided grounds for the supposition that the islands near the border were hiding places for revolutionaries. The writer of the article suggested that both Chinese and Thai made their contacts in this area and effected their illegal entry into and exit from Thailand through use of boats from the islands.(14)

SOURCES

1. Siam Nikon, 18 Dec 52
2. Siam Nikon, 22 Dec 52
3. Phim Thai, 24 Dec 52
4. Siam Nikon, 24 Dec 52
5. Siam Nikon, 20 Dec 52
6. Prachathipatai, 30 Dec 52
7. Siam Nikon, 31 Dec 52
8. Phim Thai, 27 Dec 52
9. Phim Thai, 4 Jan 53
10. Phim Thai, 21 Dec 52
11. Siam Nikon, 3 Jan 53
12. Siam Nikon, 20 Dec 52
13. Siam Nikon, 1 Jan 53
14. Prachathipatai, 13 Dec 52

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